

Testimony on Bill HB 5679, May 19, 2020, by Geri Morris, email; compassionrun@gmail.com

There was a young man who was in his twenties, lived with his parents – he moved to a small town in northern Michigan from the Washington DC area when he was 10 years old – he started using marijuana in junior high and by the time he went to high school he was buying prescription drugs on the street – this young man was diagnosed with Substance Use Disorder and put on medicine assisted treatment – he was able to get a job as a part time janitor at a school where he got some insurance to cover his treatment – sounds like a good story headed toward a happy ending...until he met a student at the school – at the same time there was another young man in his early twenties who lived in a beautiful area in Michigan with his parents ; he was a softball coach for a girls team and met a girl .... these men were young, single, immature and both stated openly they fell in love and wanted to marry these individuals -

Today both these men are in their mid thirties and reside in Jackson prisons where they have served a total time added together of eighteen ( 18 years) –both were convicted of Criminal Sexual Conduct 3rd degree for having a sexual relationship with a person between the ages of 13-15. Both were sent to a Level 4 prison because of both receiving a sentence over the recommended guidelines. Both men were first offenders and had no pattern or other occurrences of this crime. However, the Michigan Law states having a relationship with a person of these ages is a crime no one disputes that – even if the relationship was consensual (as in these cases) a person under the legal age cannot consent.

When I was asked by the volunteer coordinator for our area to write testimony on Bill HB5679 regarding the Sexual Offender Registry Act (SORA) – quick frankly it was low priority on my list of struggles with our legal system here in Michigan. You may have guessed that I am the Mom of one of the young men. Both these young men received severe punishment which continues. My son finally got a parole hearing in February – he was denied parole as he has not done well over the last several years incarcerated – trauma, prison conditions, large quantities of drugs in prison, and now the Covid-19 virus impact our prisoners .

In prison, my son tested positive twice for using Suboxone (which he was prescribed in his treatment before his incarceration). He has received NO treatment in prison. In addition, all his visiting privileges were permanently taken away – actually today May 19 last year was our final visit with him. I asked the head of the Michigan Department of Corrections for a one time visit waiver many months ago which was denied. I will quote exactly the Directors response, “We believe that loss of visiting privileges due to continued use of prohibited substances, serves as a deterrent to substance abuse by many prisoners”.

There is no data that I know of that says withholding visiting from family deters substance use disorder. Actually, it is pure punishment, added to punishment, which appears to thus be true with the Sex Offender Registry –It is time to rethink these punitive responses which circumvent what is really needed for our incarcerated population and that is to provide rational deterrents and evidence based programming, as well as treatment for conditions such as drug addiction and mental illness.